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NORWAY'S POLITICAL CRISIS.

BY PROF. H. H. BOYESEN.

THE union between Norway and Sweden is of so unique a character that it seems as if it were devised with a view to being misunderstood. I have never been able to suppress the suspicion that when Bernadotte, in 1814 (then Crown Prince of Sweden), signed the Norwegian Constitution on behalf of his adopted father, King Charles XIII., he must have laughed in his sleeve at the declaration that Norway is a free, independent and indivisible kingdom, united with Sweden. For, when presently, on his succession to the throne in 1818, he appointed a Swedish viceroy to direct the government in his absence, he showed plainly that he accepted the Constitution of Eidsvold in a purely Pickwickian sense. He knew well enough, old soldier of the French Revolution as he was, that a certain enthusiasm for liberty, equality and fraternity yet lingered in the air in spite of Metternich and the Holy Alliance; and he was perfectly willing to have the Norwegians deceive themselves with an illusion of freedom, as long as they left the reality of power in his hands. This, however, the Norwegians would not do. The presence of the viceroy was a perpetual irritation to them, until the office was practically though not formally abolished by King Oscar I. A free, independent and indivisible country, governed by a foreign viceroy! Was ever a more absurd pretence foisted upon a people? That it seemed less preposterous to the generation of 1814 than it would to their descendants of to-day was, no doubt, due to the fact that it presented an advance upon the former relation to Denmark, which was one of frankly acknowledged provincialism.

The terms of the union which I have called unique in political history have, as far as I know, no exact parallel or precedent. First, to guard against the appearance of dependence, the King (Charles XIII.) was *elected* King of Norway, and became actually King by accepting the conditions imposed by the Diet (Storthing) of 1814, which framed the constitution. Norway, though she was ceded by Denmark to Sweden by the treaty

of Kiel, never acknowledged this cession, and contended that the sovereignty which the King of Denmark renounced reverted to the Norwegian people, which had the right to bestow it upon whomsoever it pleased. Though some indecisive skirmishing took place between Swedish and Norwegian forces, no conquest was made or claimed to have been made, and it was purely by friendly negotiation and mutual concessions that the union was effected. What might have resulted in case of war *à l'outrance* it is vain to speculate upon. Sweden was utterly exhausted by the disastrous wars of Gustavus IV., and the tremendous drain upon her resources had brought her to the verge of financial ruin. Norway was scarcely better off, being worn out by the famine of 1812, consequent upon the blockading of her ports, and having no organized army worthy of the name. Honors were therefore easy ; and it is futile to imagine what might have been, if affairs had taken a hostile turn.

Bernadotte, when he ascended the throne under the name of Charles XIV., was resolved, I fancy, to make the best of a bad bargain. The democratic spirit of the Norwegian constitution was highly displeasing to him, and he was in the habit of holding up the allies as a bugbear to the Storting, when it was rebellious and refractory. The fact was, the problem which he was trying to solve was well nigh-insoluble. He was King of Norway and he was King of Sweden ; but he was not King of Norway by virtue of being King of Sweden. In Sweden, which has an ancient and powerful aristocracy whose support he could not dispense with, he had to be aristocratic and conservative ; in Norway, which in 1818 abolished whatever remnants of an aristocracy it possessed, he could only court popularity by being democratic and radical. As the same man can not be both simultaneously the King sat down, as it were, between two chairs and failed of popularity in both countries. He tried with all his might to stem the rising tide of Norwegian democracy and to impose an hereditary nobility upon the country, but he finally had to abandon the attempt and accept the inevitable.

The Norwegians have always strenuously resisted all attempts to consolidate the two nationalities. The person of the King is the only bond of union between the two kingdoms. No Swede can hold office in Norway, and no Norwegian in Sweden. The government of Norway, in its executive branch, is carried on

through a responsible ministry consisting of Norwegians only, a division of which is resident in Stockholm, so as to be in immediate contact with the King. The only officials whom the two nations have in common are the minister of foreign affairs, who has always been a Swede, and the consular and diplomatic representatives in foreign lands, who may belong to either nation. It is this anomaly which the Norwegians now wish to abolish, and they have commenced with the claim to a separate consular service, which, if granted, is sure to be followed by a demand for a separate diplomatic service and a Norwegian minister of foreign affairs. The Steen ministry, which has just resigned, on account of the king's refusal to sanction the law incorporating the former claim, represents in its extreme form this striving of the Norwegians for an absolute and unqualified equality with Sweden under the union. The Swedish diplomacy, which practically takes no account of Norway, and rather intentionally ignores her, misrepresents the country, in the sight of the world, giving the impression that she is a mere province or semi-autonomous dependency, which has no right to be heard in the councils of the nations. And how successful Sweden has been in this systematic suppression and deception every Norwegian who has lived abroad knows to his cost. He is invariably (whether he likes it or not) called a Swede, and his protests are, as a rule, received with a smile, or, perhaps, a question as to who represents his nation in Washington or London or Berlin. When he is obliged to admit that Norway is either represented by a Swede or by a Norwegian appointed by the Swedish foreign office, it is scarcely to be wondered at that his claim to a distinct nationality is taken with a large grain of salt. Moreover, it is an open secret that promotion can be secured by a Norwegian in the diplomatic service only by subserviency to and acquiescence in this traditional policy of ignoring Norway, or subordinating her interests in all respects to those of Sweden.

It is, therefore, by no means a mere question of sentiment which is at issue in the controversy now raging between the two countries, and which threatens serious consequences.

As I have observed, the separate consular service is a mere entering wedge, and leads, by a logical necessity, sooner or later, to the larger claim of an independent diplomacy. Norway has, by the bitter experience of nearly eighty years, learned that the

present arrangement simply means national extinction ; and that the only way in which she can gain recognition from the world as a nation is by having a diplomatic and consular representation which is Norwegian and not Swedish. It appears to me that this claim is so rational that no impartial judge would think of disputing it. And if, as a matter of fact, a large party in Norway do dispute it, it is either because, having never been abroad, they cannot see themselves as others see them, or because they are oblivious of their country's grand history and pusillanimously content with inferiority and provincial subordination. Even Mr. Emil Stang, the leader of this party, who, after the resignation of Mr. Steen and his colleagues, has just formed a new conservative ministry, must be aware that a country, whose relations with its neighbors are managed, not by itself, but by one of the neighbors, is not a self-governing country, however much it may delude itself with that fiction, but a semi-autonomous province or dependency. It may be because Mr. Stang privately sees this, and only officially professes blindness, that he is said to have advised the King to approve of the consular law of the late Storthing, which, however, as minister he is bound not to urge.

It is not to be denied that the present situation is a precarious one and full of dangerous possibilities. It was a foolish and rather undignified proceeding on the part of the Storthing to cut off the King's civil list, and immediately, as if to emphasize the rebuke, vote pensions to the retiring ministry. For, being a man of honor, Oscar II., even if he were personally disposed to make concessions, could not afford to incur the appearance of having been coerced or influenced by pecuniary considerations. His position in Sweden is strengthened rather than weakened by the deliberate disrespect with which he is treated by the national assembly in Norway. And we are already beginning to observe the consequences. We hear a vociferous demand from the Swedish press to "suspend the Norwegian Constitution," which is but another way of declaring war, or forcing Norway into declaring war. But as the King is the commander-in-chief of the Norwegian army, and a considerable portion of the Norwegian people would deprecate a resort to arms, the odds would necessarily be in favor of Sweden ; and the chance is worth considering that Norway might lose whatever independence she now enjoys, and after a bloody and exhausting war be reduced, temporarily at

least, to a provincial relation. It is futile to blink these ugly probabilities. Even Björnstjerne Björnson, than whom there is no more patriotic man in Norway, sees that, with an army which is not to be relied upon, as its officers are largely conservatives and have sworn allegiance to King Oscar II., and a divided public sentiment, it would be madness to provoke an armed conflict with a country which is more than twice as populous as Norway. He has therefore wisely called a halt and counseled caution and a resort to further negotiations. But the party of the Left, which for a quarter of a century have drawn much of their inspiration from his defiant courage and bold maintenance of their national honor, are deeply disappointed at what they call his desertion, his cowardice, his truckling to Sweden, and unfaithfulness to his principles. But, to my mind, this serious summons to pause and consider consequences is the bravest act of Björnson's life; for he knew perfectly well what a storm of denunciation he would call down upon himself by antagonizing the dominant spirit within the party which he has himself been largely instrumental in creating. It is, however, the part of true statesmanship not to rush blindly ahead, impelled by a mighty enthusiasm; but to consider ways and means and with cool prevision forecast results, even when they are likely to be undesirable.

That the Swedish government realizes the gravity of the situation, and is determined to support the King in his unconciliatory attitude, is obvious from the debate in both chambers of the Riksdag, April 12, 1893. A committee of the Lower House then reported emphatically against any concession to Norway's demand for a separate consular service, and the report was adopted, as the sense of the House, by a vote of 184 to 38. The discussion of the government's proposition to grant the King a certain provisional right to levy on communes and individuals for munitions of war, in case of army mobilization, was also highly significant, although the moderate counsel of Mr. Adolf Hedin then prevailed, stipulating that the Riksdag should be convoked, in extraordinary session, whenever there was cause for mobilization of the army, and that such mobilization should never be justified except for the purpose of maintaining the neutrality of the kingdom, or for defence in case of attack. It cannot, therefore, be said that the Lower House has thrown down the gauntlet to Norway or exhibited a challenging

spirit. In fact, the democracy of Sweden, which is already a force to be reckoned with, has shown a considerable sympathy with the aspiration of Norway for complete coördination under the Union, and it is only that portion of the press known as the Grand-Swedish organs (*Storsvenskar*) which, by its loud braggadocio and insults, has industriously fanned the embers of discord.

If the first Bernadotte had bequeathed to his descendants a policy of full and frank recognition of Norway's claim to equality with the larger kingdom, I venture to assert that the relations between the two countries would, to-day, have been friendly, if not cordial. No nation that is worthy of freedom will willingly acquiesce in subordination and feel grateful for whatever crumbs of self-government may be granted to it after long and acrimonious agitation. Every concession which Norway has wrested from Sweden has been secured by the most indefatigable and clamorous demand, and by an attitude of stubborn self-assertion and pugnacity. It is to this persistence in her opposition to all attempts at amalgamation and a jealous vigilance over her constitutional rights that she owes whatever measure of liberty she now enjoys. If, on the other hand, the Kings of the House of Bernadotte had comprehended and sympathized with this perfectly legitimate aspiration for coördination and equality under the Union, and appeared in Sweden as interpreters of Norwegian opinion, as in Norway they have appeared as the representatives of Swedish opinion, loyalty and gratitude would have been fostered and the two nations would have joined hands in many an undertaking in which they have now held jealously aloof. They would have presented a united and, therefore, far more formidable front than they do to-day, sundered as they are in sentiment and only held together by a hateful political necessity. But the Kings have, since the first Bernadotte and his son Oscar I., been Swedes exclusively, and by the very fact of their foreign descent they have been anxious to emphasize their Swedish patriotism and their complete identification with the interests of the larger country. It is, of course, perfectly natural that being born in Sweden they should be Swedes, and I am far from blaming them for their devotion to the cause which they conceived to be that of the country of their birth. No man can be of two nationalities, and I know no man, except the King of the House of Bernadotte, who has been placed in this difficult predicament of professing more than one.

The fact is they have rarely displayed the least comprehension of the spirit which animates the Norwegian people, and they have accordingly been unable to rise to that higher statesmanship which would have cemented the union, year by year, as surely as the policy they have pursued has strained it to the point of disruption. Oscar I. and Charles XV. had, perhaps, occasional glimpses of a deeper comprehension, and to the former Norway certainly owes a debt of gratitude. But Oscar II. has betrayed an alienism and a narrowness of vision, in his dealings with Norwegian affairs, which certainly cannot have commended him to the affection of his Norse subjects. And, if rumor be true, his son, the present Crown Prince, is still more ultra-Swedish and still more determined to chastise the "rebellious and ungrateful Norwegians" into obedience and submission.

Now, suppose such an attempt was made, and was, as perhaps it might be, temporarily successful. What would Sweden or the House of Bernadotte gain by such a victory? To keep Norway in a state of permanent subjection, which I do not believe can be done, would demand a constant expenditure of men and money which would weaken Sweden, produce unending strife and turmoil, and strain her resources to the utmost. For the Norwegians, as their history shows, are not of the stuff that slaves are made of; and it would require a far greater power than Sweden has at her command to reduce them to submission.

This is indeed worth taking into account; and there are many excellent men in Sweden who see it plainly. On the other hand, it is contended that if the demands of Norway for separate consular service and ultimately separate diplomatic officers were granted, the Norwegian minister of foreign affairs might antagonize that of Sweden, and the two kingdoms would no longer present to the world a united front. Well, nor do they now. The chances of antagonism are, however, infinitely minimized, when no cause for jealousy exists (the nations being absolutely co-ordinate), and the King being yet the superior officer of both ministers whom the envoys of both countries at foreign capitals represent. There would perhaps be one cause for disagreement where now there are a hundred, and the union which now is a grudging and compulsory one, and therefore weak, would then be a friendly and voluntary one and accordingly strong.

HJALMAR HJORTH BOYESEN.